CHANGING CONTOURS OF TERRORISM:
A BACKGROUNDER ON JAISH-E-MOHAMMED

AUTHOR: MOHIT MUSADDI

WWW.PRFWORLD.ORG
ABOUT US

Politeia Research Foundation, a non-profit initiative, will reflect on global and public policy issues. The research foundation will engage with plural worldviews and the transmission of ideas with inputs from a wide spectrum of scholars, practitioners and learners from multiple disciplines and diverse backgrounds. Besides researching international political, societal, security and economic issues, the foundation aspires to foster peacebuilding approaches to facilitate relevant conversations through publications, deliberative processes and related activities. The foundation in its work will uphold and value the liberty, equality and dignity of the individual.

AUTHOR

Mohit Musaddi, Fellow, Politeia Research Foundation

Mohit Musaddi is a Fellow at the Politeia Research Foundation (PRF). He also works as a Researcher on India-Bangladesh and India-Myanmar relations at the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) Kolkata, India. He was previously a Research Associate at the Delhi Policy Group (DPG), India from 2017-2021. He has an MA in International Relations from the War Studies Department of King’s College London and a BA (Hons.) in Political Science from Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Politeia Research Foundation

26-05-2023
India hosted a G20 Tourism Working Group meeting in Srinagar from May 22-24, 2023, with the participation of over 60 delegates from most member states. This was the first such gathering in the state since India’s abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 and was a chance for the country to attract tourism to the state and showcase that the decision has brought peace and prosperity to the region. Over the years, in relative terms, there has been a reduction in terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The number of incidents decreased from 417 in 2018 to 229 in 2021, while the number of security personnel killed also went down from 91 to 42 during the same period. As a result, J&K recorded a tourist footfall of 1.88 crores in 2022, including 26.73 lakhs in Kashmir alone, the highest over the last three decades. Last year also witnessed a 14.64 per cent economic growth and tax revenue shot up to 31 per cent. Such an uptick in economic activities will further make it difficult to sustain terrorism in the valley.

Nevertheless, persistent efforts have been ongoing by state-sponsored terrorist organisations to continue the high level of violence in the region. For instance, on February 28 this year, two security personnel were killed, and another was injured in armed clashes with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) militants. Further, on May 05, five soldiers were killed, and one officer was injured after militants triggered a remote-controlled improvised explosive device (RCIED) at Kesari Hills forests in the Kandi area in Rajouri District. The attack was claimed by the People’s Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF), which is an offshoot of the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM or Jaish) terror group.
Jaish was formed in Pakistan’s Punjab Province in March 2000 by Masood Azhar with the aim to “unite Kashmir with Pakistan”. The organisation aims to establish an Islamic state based on its narrow interpretation of Islamic law. The JeM is a terrorist outfit controlled and operated through Pakistan. Reports have indicated that Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) provides the JeM with “funding, training and logistical support to fight a proxy war against India”. JeM quickly emerged as a militant group actively involved in the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir. It carried out attacks against Indian security forces, government institutions, and civilians in the region. While its founder Masood Azhar was captured and held in an Indian prison for five years, he was released as part of a prisoner exchange agreement in December 1999 following the hijacking of the Indian Airlines Flight 814 (IC814) led by Azhar’s associates. Upon its establishment, JeM set up its headquarters at a seminary in Bahawalpur City in Pakistan. From JeM’s operations in its early days, it became clear that the organisation had the Pakistan military’s support.

JeM’s ideology aligns with the Taliban due to the Deobandi creed, which forms the primary ideological and religious base for both groups. It promotes the ideology of violent jihad as a means to achieve its goals and advocates for armed struggle, and considers jihad as a religious duty, particularly in the context of the Kashmir conflict. Azhar was associated with Afghan mujahideen groups during the Soviet-Afghan War, where he interacted with individuals who later became influential figures in al Qaeda. There have been reports that JeM members have received training in al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan and obtained logistical support from the Taliban. A UN Report has stated that JeM “maintains eight training camps in Nangarhar, three of which are directly under Taliban control”.

Soon after its founding, JeM carried out a suicide bombing outside an Indian army facility in Srinagar in April 2000, during which four security personnel and three civilians were injured. JeM’s major attack took place on December 25, 2000, when a 24-year-old British citizen drove an explosive-laden car to the 15 Corps headquarters in Badami Bagh, killing eleven people, including five soldiers. Further, in October 2001, a vehicle-borne IED was rammed into the gates of the J&K legislative assembly, after which two gunmen opened fire, killing 38 people. Five JeM militants executed a similar attack on India’s parliament in New Delhi a couple of months later, killing nine people. Subsequently, the US designated JeM as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) in December 2001, two months after the United Nations had done the same. This was after India had launched an intense diplomatic effort and appeal to the international community following the J&K Legislative Assembly attack.

JeM’s influence and operations in the Kashmir Valley began to decline following its designation as a terrorist organisation. After the Parliament attack, JeM was banned in Pakistan and branded as a terrorist organisation by several countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom. However, JeM continued to receive favourable treatment from Pakistani agencies, and the organisation continued to operate under different names and underwent a process of reorganisation. Post the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan had also joined the US ‘War on Terror’, which led JeM to demand President Pervez Musharraf’s resignation. Jaish militants also reportedly attempted failed assassination attempts on Musharraf in December 2003. Subsequently, the Pakistan Army arrested and executed those responsible for the attempted assassination. Azhar Masood was put under frequent house arrests in Bhawalpur. Nevertheless, the operations were aimed against a few individuals and not against the whole organisation, as Jaish maintained operational efficiency and its capabilities to conduct terror strikes were not severely dented. A few years later, President Musharraf admitted that Pakistani intelligence used JeM to conduct terror attacks in India. When queried why he did not take stricter action against the JeM as a President, President Musharraf replied that “those times were different”. Therefore, the operations by Pakistan’s establishment were cosmetic measures rather than genuine counter-terrorism efforts.
Recognising the fact that Pakistan was not taking genuine actions against the Jaish, India carried out a well-crafted Indian intelligence operation in Lolab in early 2004, during which a mole deep inside the Jaish helped the security forces kill many of its top operatives. Meanwhile, there were reports that Masood Azhar continued to run JeM under the name Khuddam-ul-Islam.

For more than a decade after that, Jaish failed to gain a foothold in India. Its Kashmir Chief, Sajad Afghani, was killed along with his associate Omar Bilal in March 2011 along the banks of the Dal Lake. Afghani’s successor Qari Yasir was killed in an encounter in July 2013, while another successor Adil Pathan was killed at Tral in October 2015. However, on January 02, 2016, four JeM militants attacked an air base in Pathankot, killing seven Indian security personnel and one civilian, and injuring numerous others. The JeM’s revival in India was further boosted by the infiltration of two of its groups in August 2016 through Kupwara and Poonch during the protests that followed the assassination of Burhan Wani, Hizbul Mujahideen’s commander.

In September 2016, four JeM militants attacked an Indian army brigade headquarters in Uri, killing 19 security personnel and injuring up to 30 others. In retaliation to the attack, the Indian Army conducted surgical strikes on militant launchpads in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), killing up to 40 suspected Jaish militants.
According to news reports, as of 2019, there are approximately 56 Jaish militants in the Kashmir Valley, of which 21 militants are operating in three districts of North Kashmir with 35 others in South Kashmir. On February 14, 2019, a JeM suicide bomber carried out an attack on a convoy of vehicles carrying Indian security personnel along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway in Pulwama, killing 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel. In response, India conducted three airstrikes under Operation Bandar in Balakot, a town in the Banshera District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province of Pakistan.

In the subsequent years, Jaish has been making persistent efforts to revive insurgency and terrorism in the Kashmir Valley. As part of these efforts, five security personnel were killed in an explosion triggered by suspected JeM militants in the Kesari hill forest area of Jammu and Kashmir’s Rajouri District on May 05, 2023. More recently, on May 21, 2023, a JeM operative was arrested for allegedly passing on secret information about the movement of security forces in Jammu and Kashmir ahead of the state hosting a three-day G20 Working Group meeting.

JeM has also made its presence felt on social media, and militants have instigated radicals in Kashmir to increase their protests against the Indian government. Indian intelligence officials stated that following the abrogation of Article 370, “the re-emergence of the Jaish in the public sphere implied that restraints imposed on it by Pakistan’s military were being eased, in response to the unfolding crisis in Jammu and Kashmir.”
**JeM’s numerous outfits and multiple identities**

Terrorist organisations such as the JeM often create new platforms to avoid international sanctions and may also create conditions of plausible deniability among the international community. It also conveys an impression that their cause has significant support, which is evident in the emergence of numerous similar offshoots. An example in this regard is the emergence of the People’s Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF), an offshoot of Jaish.

Five Rashtriya Rifles (RR) soldiers were killed in an ambush in the Poonch District of Jammu Division by the PAFF in April 2023. The PAFF released a 2.50-minute-long video clip of the ambush on social media. PAFF is led by one of Masood Azhar’s brothers, Mufti Abdul Rauf Azhar. It emerged in 2019 and was proscribed by the Government of India as a terrorist outfit in January 2023. PAFF has allegedly been responsible for several attacks in J&K, including the killing of BJP leader Rakesh Pandita in June 2021; ambushed killing of four Indian soldiers in Rajouri in August 2022; the killing of nine security personnel in the Mendhar tehsil of Poonch District in October 2021; and the assassination of the Director General of prisons in J&K, Hemant Lohia in October 2022.

Apart from PAFF, JeM has created other fringe outfits such as Kashmir Tigers and J&K Ghaznavi Force (JKGF). The Kashmir Tigers are a direct offshoot of JeM and were responsible for carrying out a terrorist attack killing two police officers and injuring 12 others on the outskirts of Srinagar in December 2021. The JKGF, on the other hand, which emerged in 2020, is a hybrid strike unit comprised of JeM and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) cadres. The JKGF have conducted grenade attacks in Ramban, Jammu and Poonch districts targeting police and paramilitary forces. In February 2023, the Indian government designated JKGF as a terrorist organisation under the provision of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

**Terror financing**

Significant financial resources are required to maintain the large-scale activities of terrorist organisations. The JeM has several reported funding sources. They have close links to al-Qaeda and received early funding from Osama bin Laden, which was used to take over seminaries and set up training camps in Pakistan. JeM is known to exploit charitable organisations and donations to finance its activities. Some reports indicate that sympathisers and supporters within Pakistan and abroad contribute funds to JeM through various channels, including religious charities and individuals. The Al-Rehmat Trust is the principal source of income for JeM and continues to operate despite being sanctioned by several countries. Further, it generates funds through criminal activities such as extortion, smuggling, and drug trafficking. These illicit activities provide a significant source of income to support its operations. The United States Bureau of Counterterrorism has noted that JeM often withdraws funds from bank accounts and invests in legal businesses such as commodity trading, real estate and consumer goods.

In April 2023, several reports indicated that JeM was openly conducting fundraisers in Peshawar in the presence of security personnel. JeM’s fundraising activities have also been reported in Punjab Province and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. While the Pakistani government has consistently denied providing any official support to the organisation, there have been intelligence assessments suggesting that JeM receives financial and logistical support from elements within the Pakistani establishment. JeM’s overt funding raising campaign in different
parts of Pakistan could not have happened without the active support of Pakistan’s state apparatus.

Jaish’s operations have been further boosted after the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) announced Pakistan’s removal from its grey list for complying with its action plan on money laundering and financing of terrorism. There were reports in October 2022 that JeM “is expanding its sprawling Jama-e-Masjid Subhanallah and Sabir madrasa complex in Bahawalpur”\textsuperscript{10}. Moreover, an India Today investigation found that JeM has “widened its annual fund collection drive seeking to build new mosques”\textsuperscript{16}. JeM also reportedly uses social media platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube in its fundraising efforts\textsuperscript{41}.

**Expanding the terror geography**

While JeM’s primary focus for terrorism remains the Kashmir Valley, there have been reports of the outfit’s activities in other countries. In an article published in 2017, Masood Azhar called for his followers to “prepare for action in Myanmar” following the military’s crackdown on the Rohingyas\textsuperscript{12}. Indian intelligence had also reported that Jaish operatives had previously helped provide warfare training to Rohingya-based militant groups at camps in Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts in 2013-14\textsuperscript{42}.

In another instance, an intelligence report from 2018 stated that JeM may be planning to attack Indian navy warships using deep sea divers, who had been undertaking such training in Bahawalpur, Pakistan\textsuperscript{13}. The intelligence resurfaced in 2022 after some abandoned boats were spotted in Sir Creek – a tidal estuary along the Indo-Pak border\textsuperscript{43}. Reports indicated that up to 50 JeM militants were undergoing training in deep-sea diving to launch an attack\textsuperscript{44}.

JeM’s most significant attack outside of India took place in July 2008, when a suicide bomber detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) near the Indian Embassy in Kabul, killing 58 people, including Indian diplomats, Afghan security personnel, and civilians. The attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul was seen as an attempt to target Indian interests and undermine India’s presence and influence in Afghanistan. There have also been reports indicating that the JeM, along with the Islamic State (IS) carried out an attack at a gurudwara in Kabul on June 19, 2022, in which two people were killed\textsuperscript{45}. The IS released a video alleging blasphemy and criticising the Taliban for trying to establish diplomatic relations with India.

**Conclusion**

Over the years, India has continued to carry out consistent diplomatic efforts to sanction Masood Azhar in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Using its veto power, China blocked three such attempts, arguing that “there was no reason to believe he was still active”\textsuperscript{46}. Following the Pulwama attack in 2019, India submitted audio clips of speeches that Azhar had made in the days leading up to the attack, compelling China to change its stance and leading to the JeM chief being sanctioned\textsuperscript{47}.

Following the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, New Delhi raised security concerns in the United Nations, urging the “world community to collectively ensure that Afghanistan’s territory is not used for sheltering, training, planning terrorist acts, especially by groups proscribed by the UN Security Council”, such as the JeM\textsuperscript{50}. India’s concerns have been genuine after reports emerged that JeM is expanding its base to Afghanistan with help from the Taliban and will therefore have access to more technology and territory\textsuperscript{51}.
Terror organisations such as JeM have received significant state support since inception and have also garnered support from influential segments of society. International sanctions against Masood Azhar were delayed because of a veto by a UNSC permanent member. Even after being sanctioned, it remains unclear whether Azhar’s assets have been frozen and a travel ban imposed by Pakistan. On the contrary, in September 2022, Pakistan wrote a letter to Afghanistan asking the Taliban to arrest Azhar, with intelligence suggesting he may be hiding in the Nangarhar and Kanhar areas. Reacting to the letter, the Taliban spokesperson stated that Azhar was not in Afghanistan and instead remarked that “this is an organisation which could be in Pakistan”. In 2022, China put a ‘technical hold’ on the joint proposal at the United Nations Security Council to designate Masood Azhar’s brother as a global terrorist, which would subject him to assets freeze, a travel ban and an arms embargo. While all other 14 member states of the top UN body supported the move, China reportedly wanted more time to assess the proposal.

As events in the neighbourhood have demonstrated, organisations like these with transnational links can severely undermine security in the South Asian region. JeM is constantly morphing into several offshoots and spawning new terror outfits. Therefore, it becomes important for international organisations and frameworks such as FATF to constantly monitor the activities of not only states but also such terrorist entities which operate with the help of these states and their associated agencies.
ENDNOTES

1. "Year End Review 2022: Ministry of Home Affairs", Press Information Bureau, January 03, 2023
5. "Datasheet: Jammu and Kashmir", South Asia Terrorism Portal, May 05, 2023
8. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ehsan Fazili, "Was it suicide?", The Tribune, December 26, 2000
13. Shishir Gupta, "Terror group Jaish gets a new name, preps 30 suicide attackers to hit India", The Hindustan Times, March 06, 2019
14. "Pak intel used JeM for attacks in India during my tenure: Musharraf", Hindustan Times, March 29, 2021
16. "Pakistan Intelligence Used Jaish For Attacks In India: Pervez Musharraf", NDTV, March 07, 2019
17. "Pakistan intelligence used Jaish-e-Mohammad to target India, says Pervez Musharraf", India Today, March 7, 2019
18. Bashaarat Masood, "Jaish's journey: Parliament attack to Pulwama", The Indian Express, February 17, 2019
20. Bashaarat Masood, "Jaish's journey: Parliament attack to Pulwama", The Indian Express, February 17, 2019
21. Rohan Dua & Neeraj Chauhan, "Pathankot attack was code-named 'nikaah'", The Times of India, December 20, 2022
22. Bashaarat Masood, "Jaish's journey: Parliament attack to Pulwama", The Indian Express, February 17, 2019
23. "Surgical strike day: Here's how the 2016 operation was carried out", The Hindustan Times, September 29, 2021
24. Bashaarat Masood, "Jaish's journey: Parliament attack to Pulwama", The Indian Express, February 17, 2019
25. "Nation pays homage to CRPF jawans killed in 2019 Pulwama attack", Deccan Herald, February 14, 2023
26. "Balakot airstrikes: How Indian Air Force carried out a successful retaliation four years back", Wion, February 25, 2023
27. "Terror attack in J&K’s Rajouri district: Searches continue, no fresh contact with terrorists", The Telegraph, May 7, 2023
28. "J&K terror conspiracy: NIA arrests JeM operative as part of its crackdown in Kashmir", The Indian Express, May 21, 2023
29. Praveen Swami, "Despite ban, Jaish-e-Mohammed reappears on social media to instigate Islamists in Kashmir to heighten protest against India", Firstpost, August 22, 2019
30. Ravi Krishnan Khajuria, "PAFF releases edited video of Poonch ambush, promises full footage 'soon'", Hindustan Times, May 09, 2023
31. "What is People's Anti-Fascist Front, terror outfit that claimed responsibility for Poonch attack?", DNA, April 21, 2023 Also see, "J&K: Four soldiers killed in terror attack on Army camp in Rajouri", The Indian Express, August 12, 2022 Also see, Sunil Bhat, "J&K prisons DGP death: No terror angle, CCTV shows domestic help fled crime scene, says police", India Today, October 04, 2022
37. Ibid.
38. Banned terror outfit JeM seen openly collecting funds in Pakistan’s Peshawar, ANI, April 24, 2023
39. Praveen Swami and Heena Fatima, “As terror watchdog FATF considers reprieve for Pakistan, Jaish-e-Mohammed is expanding seminary”, The Print, October 20, 2022
40. Arvind Ojha and Ankit Kumar, “Terror outfit Jaish widens fund collection after Pak’s exit from FATF grey list | Exclusive”, India Today, December 20, 2022
41. Ayushman Kaul, “JeM Financier Uses Social Media to Amplify Terrorist Propaganda Calling on Indian Muslims to Revolt,” The Wire, August 11, 2022
42. Praveen Swami, “Jaish-e-Muhammad chief Masood Azhar calls for action in Myanmar”, The Indian Express, September 12, 2017
43. Ibid.
44. Vishnu Som, “Jaish Terrorists Training In Deep Sea Diving To Hit Navy Warships: Sources”, NDTV, July 18, 2018
45. “50 Jaish terrorists training in deep diving, may launch attack on India via sea: BSF sources”, India Today, February 04, 2022
46. Ibid.
47. Manoj Gupta, “JeM Carried Out Kabul Gurdwara Attack in IS Name, Reveal Top Intel Sources, Blame A ‘Miffed’ Pakistan”, CNN-News 18, June 20, 2022
49. Geeta Mohan, “China claims no proof linking Masood Azhar to JeM, India submits audio tapes” India Today, March 13, 2019
51. Suhasini Haidar, “Taliban is allowing LeT and JeM to shift base to Afghanistan, claims former Afghan Security chief”, The Hindu, December 02, 2022
52. “Taliban’s Retort To Pakistan: Jaish Chief Masood Azhar With You, Not Us”, NDTV, September 15, 2022
53. Ibid.
54. “’There Should Be No Double Standards On Terrorism’: MEA On China Blocking Bid To Blacklist Masood Azhar’s Brother,” ABP, August 12, 2022